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RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL PRIORITY 5349
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 1473
RUEHCHI/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI PRIORITY 6347
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BANGKOK 000721

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [TH](#)

SUBJECT: THAILAND'S BURMA POLICY: CHANGES AROUND THE EDGES
AS FM KASIT VISITS BURMA

REF: A. BANGKOK 505 (ASEAN CIVIL SOCIETY SHOWDOWN)

[1](#)B. BANGKOK 517 (ASEAN SUMMIT ROUNDUP)

[1](#)C. CHIANG MAI 37

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Classified By: DCM James F. Entwistle, reason: 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY. As Thailand's Foreign Minister Kasit Piromya conducts the first high-ranking civilian visit to Burma March 22-23 since the Democrat-led government entered office in December, Thailand's official Burma policy has shown signs of adjustment from the rhetoric and principles which had prevailed since former PM Thaksin came to office in 2001. At the same time, however, questions have arisen whether the Thai military for the first time since 2002 may be once again conducting its own separate approach to Burma policy. On the one hand, FM Kasit and Prime Minister Abhisit met Burma civil society activists in the run-up to and during the recent Thai-hosted ASEAN Summit February 27-March 1 (ref A); the Thai representative to the Human Rights Council in Geneva pressed for positive changes on democratization and human rights; and civil society activists ramped up Burma-related outreach. On the other, both the Chief of the Royal Thai Defense Forces and the Army Commander visited Burma in the weeks leading to the ASEAN summit, gaining meetings with the top two ranking Burmese Generals at a level Thai civilian leaders cannot match, while Thai military pressure on at least the Karen National Union (KNU) along the border has increased recently (ref C).

[1](#)2. (C) COMMENT: We find it interesting that the Thais appear willing to press the GOB to be more inclusive in its political process, focusing particularly on armed insurgent groups operating on the border, at the same time the Thai military has put pressure on the KNU. Reconciliation between the GOB and insurgents would, of course, simplify matters for the RTG. We believe FM Kasit is personally sympathetic to concerns about the repressive nature of the Burmese regime and has been personally involved in the symbolic and rhetorical changes in recent weeks seen around the edges of the ASEAN Summit and in Geneva. However, it remains unclear to us the extent to which he may actively reorient RTG policy on Burma, given the wide range of vexing issues on which Thailand must engage Burma and the countervailing sentiments on Burma policy held by prominent MFA officials and others across the Thai officialdom more sympathetic to the Thaksin approach. We will seek a readout of Kasit's trip to Burma upon his return. END SUMMARY AND COMMENT.

13. (C) FM Kasit arrived in Burma March 22 for a two day visit. MFA Director in the East Asian Affairs Department Kallayana Vipattipumiprates previewed a wide-range of 10-12 issues with us March 13 that he said Kasit would address with the GOB on the visit. At the top of the Thai agenda would be encouraging a broader composition of stakeholders in the political dialogue in the run up to 2010 elections, expansion of the Tripartite Core Group (TCG) mechanism, and Rohingya and other migrant issues, according to Kallayana; initial Thai press reports indicate that the Rohingya issue dominated Kasit's March 22 discussion with Burmese FM Nyan Win.

14. (C) On Burma's stalled political dialogue, Kallayana said Thailand would encourage the junta to include armed insurgent groups as stakeholders, since the political dialogue inside Burma had to be more inclusive if it were to be seen as credible, and Kasit wanted to take personal measure of the GOB commitment to do so before he committed the RTG to push the armed insurgent groups to cooperate. During a March 8 visit to Ranong province, which included a meeting with detained Rohingya, FM Kasit publicly stressed the need for the Burmese junta to expand the political dialogue and release political prisoners.

15. (C) Other items on the agenda, according to Kallayana, included RTG intent to provide education/vocational training to Burmese displaced persons in camps along the Thai-Burma border; Thai concerns in a recent surge of opium cultivation and methamphetamine production, particularly by the Wa; Thai registration of Burmese migrant labor via two-year work permits; energy cooperation, including FM Kasit's stated

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intent to ensure any possible Thai investment, such as a proposed hydroelectric generating dam on the Salween River, undergoes the same environmental/community impact review as it would in Thailand; the status of armed insurgent groups; and stalled Joint Border Commission (JBC) demarcation efforts (no progress since 2003).

...IN THE WAKE OF ASEAN SUMMIT, HRC STATEMENTS...

16. (C) Kasit's visit to Burma comes in the wake of the February 27-March 1 ASEAN Summit hosted by Thailand at which Burma-related issues figured prominently, particularly in the FM meeting and in civil society engagement, both before and during the Summit, when PM Abhisit and Kasit openly engaged Burma civil society activists and 1990 MPs-elect (Ref A-B). Kallayana stated that the RTG had three main objectives for the Burma agenda at the ASEAN Summit. First, the extension of the mandate for the Tripartite Core Group (TCG); second, political development in Burma; third, cooperation on the disposition of Rohingya migrants. Kallayana assessed there had been moderate success on the first two points and none on the third, despite the frank interventions by the Malaysian and Singaporean FMs and the Thai and Singaporean PMs that the junta had to show more inclusiveness if its roadmap and plans for 2010 elections were to have any credibility. While the release of political prisoners did not come up in the PM meeting, it was included in the Summit statement, Kallayana noted.

17. (C) The flexibility shown by Abhisit and Kasit in meeting Burmese democracy activists, reversing eight years of precedent, was matched in a change in tone in Geneva at the Human Rights Council March 16, reflecting Kasit's stated desire for Thailand to rediscover its international voice. During discussion of the Burma resolution, Thai deputy PermRep Vijavat Isarabhakdi emphasized that the responsibility for engagement rests with the GOB in addressing the international community's concerns and that the RTG hoped to see Burma move forward along the process of

reconciliation and democratization through an inclusive process broadened to include all different political forces. Vijavat also stated the RTG's hope for progress in expanding the TCG mandate and on human rights and humanitarian assistance, with a view to broadening the humanitarian space in Burma.

¶8. (C) Democrat deputy party leader and MP Kraisaak Choonhaven, who had been in the running for the FM portfolio, told us March 13 that he had encouraged Kasit to be more vocal in public about the need to open up political space in Burma, similar to Kasit's Ranong's comments. He said that if Kasit were to do this, it could be a small political success for the RTG. Kraisaak stated that Kasit appears more willing to criticize Burma, and predicted that the Abhisit administration would reduce the pressure against anti-GOB political activists in Thailand in comparison to Thaksin associated governments.

¶9. (SBU) Separately on March 13, the Forum for Democracy in Burma launched the Free Burma's Political Prisoners Now effort on Burma's Human Rights Day at the Foreign Correspondents Club of Thailand, part of the effort to collect 888,888 signatures before May 24, the date that Aung San Suu Kyi is scheduled to be released from house arrest. Moe Zaw Oo and Su Mon Aye, both former political prisoners, spoke at the ceremony, along with Deputy Secretary General of the Thai National Human Rights Commission Weerawit Weeraworawit. Citing international obligations associated with UN membership, Weerawit stated that Thailand and ASEAN were too weak on the Burmese regime and should adhere to the UN Declaration of Human Rights. He stressed that displaced Burmese who came to Thailand did not come to enjoy the "fun" of Thailand but continued to suffer, as they did at the hands of the Burmese regime.

...AND HIGH RANKING MILITARY VISITS, PRESSURE ON BORDER

¶10. (C) Despite some recent promising signs in Thai rhetoric and symbolic actions, the complex range of issues and players between Thailand and Burma defies easy pigeonholing or

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reversal. While Kasit has repeatedly made clear in public statements and private meetings that the "vested interests" of past PMs such as Thaksin and Samak would no longer be on the RTG's agenda with Burma, some commentators have wondered recently whether the Thai military might be inching back into the game. Both Chief of Defense Force Songkitti and Army Commander Anupong made trips to Burma in recent weeks, scoring meetings with the top two generals Than Shwe (Anupong) and Maung Aye (both) that Thai civilian leaders would never achieve.

¶11. (C) Than Shwe had noticeable back pain which led to limited mobility during GEN Anupong's February 17-18 visit, Kallayana indicated. Kallayana stated that Anupong's trip focused on border security; denying suggestions of an independent military policy perspective, Kallayana said that the army had requested an MFA briefing on various border issues to ensure proper coordination. Anupong was prepared to rebut possible Burmese concerns about Thai use of unmanned aerial surveillance vehicles (UAVs) along the border, but the Burmese did not raise the issue, Kallayana said. Anupong raised the Rohingya issue with Maung Aye, who indicated a willingness to cooperate with Thai authorities - a more forthcoming response than Maung Aye had given to CHOD GEN Songkitti several weeks earlier. Overall, Kallayana judged that Anupong's visit was very well received by the Burmese.

¶12. (C) In contrast, MP Kraisaak, a long-standing vocal critic of the Burmese regime and the Thai military, expressed suspicion of the motives behind Anupong's visit to Burma, particularly since it came on the eve of the ASEAN Summit and before civilian leaders had visited. Kraisaak speculated

whether Anupong might have traveled to Burma to promote "vested" interests of the Thai military, perhaps offering to pressure armed insurgent groups to abandon their offices in Thailand and return across the border into Burma in exchange for junta sanctioning of RTA concessions involving hotels and casinos inside Burma (Ref C details recent increased RTA pressure on the KNU).

¶13. (C) Sunai Phasuk, Consultant for Human Rights Watch (HRW) and Kraissak associate, suggested on March 13 that the military was suppressing migrant activity along the Thai-Burma border near Mae Sot, where troops were more actively checking identification cards recently.
JOHN